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## Book Review

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*Nostalgia and Recollection in Victorian Culture* by Ann C. Colley. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. Pp. x + 218. \$59.95.

For us as “postmoderns,” nostalgia repeatedly, incorrigibly seems to assume one of two forms, each disturbing and unappealing in its own way. On one hand, there is the form with which most Americans, at least, have been familiar for years, starting perhaps with the romanticization of the “good old days” and the “gay Nineties” (the preferred telos of nostalgia for Henry Ford's Greenfield Village or virtually anything Disney) and leading to the nostalgia of the 1960s and early 1970s for the 1920s and 1930s, the later 1970s and 1980s for the 1950s, and the 1990s for the 1940s but also, strikingly, for the 1960s and 1970s. This mode of nostalgia dizzyingly both consecrates and consumes not what Fredric Jameson labels “facts or historical realities” of the past time that is its object but what he marks as “stereotypes, of ideas and facts and historical realities,” as anyone who has lived to experience both a period in its present and its reification through this mode's nostalgia machinery will attest. Indeed, and partly because of its simplifying misconstructions of the past period, this engineered nostalgia may target mainly those who, having been very young children during the period or even born after it, did not live it. Moreover, as it is brought to us or imposed on us primarily by film, television, and the phenomenon of decade-specific Oldies radio stations, this nostalgia is multiply mediated.

Perhaps as a corrective to the deliberate falsifications or inadvertent blindnesses of this form of nostalgia, nostalgia in our time also has taken the form of minutely realized—and distinctly unsanitized—recreations of past periods, especially the Victorian, characteristically emphasizing what earlier representations may have ignored, glossed over, or intentionally suppressed. The most stunning recent instance is Mike Leigh's evocation of the milieu of Gilbert and Sullivan in *Topsy-Turvy* (1999), which richly but unrelievedly brings into relief the darkneses—morphine injections, bruised actresses, the torture of corsets for both males and females, the gaiety and sleaze of brothels—that always encroached on the diverting illuminations of the Savoy operas, with a particularity and thoroughness eschewed by (but also to some extent unavailable to) the film's predecessor, *The Story of Gilbert and Sullivan* (1953). Of course, Leigh is not alone among those whose revisionist representations of Victorian culture have enhanced our awareness of the period: one might also mention the rash of recent films from the Victorian dark or unmentionable side—*The Piano*, *Angels and Insects*, *Oscar and Lucinda*, *The Governess*—along with Public Television's *The 1900 House*, which within its first 30 minutes, notably lingers on the horrors of having to do laundry with a mangle and zooms in on the technique of fabricating sanitary napkins from rag cloth.

Though it would be unfair to suggest that either of these prevailing forms of nostalgia, especially the second, is not culturally revealing or perversely reassuring, even necessary for us, it can be argued that neither form deeply engages and interrogates the dynamics of nostalgia and the recollection that always accompanies it. That is, both forms of nostalgia present us with or, rather, plunge us into representations of the past period that we experience and evaluate without necessarily reflecting on what nostalgia as a mode of consciousness can or cannot accomplish. Refreshingly, Ann Colley's study, *Nostalgia and Recollection in Victorian Culture*, aims to do just that, to develop an understanding of the critical and constructive roles nostalgia and recollection come to play in the thought and experience of Victorian writers—Darwin, Ruskin, Pater, Gaskell, and preeminently Robert Louis Stevenson—and artists such as Ford Madox Brown and J. M. W. Turner. Through a series of close and extremely scrupulous readings of the verbal and visual works that arise, at least in part, from the homesickness and longing for return that nostalgia denotes, Colley argues that for these figures “nostalgia is a significantly more complicated experience than the easy utterance of the word usually allows. Theirs is not a response that primarily trivializes, simplifies and misrepresents a former time; instead, their writing toward home is an event that brings into itself all the intricacies of the nostalgic experience” (4). Colley wants to show that nostalgia emerges as “an organizing force in the imagination and memory,” one that allows those who move into it to “create new maps” (ibid.).

Take the case of Charles Darwin, with which Colley opens her book. Darwin left England on the H.M.S. *Beagle* in December 1832. Colley suggests that, although he was far from immune to the predictable and commonplace experiences of homesickness and longing for England during the voyage, Darwin crucially turned the tendencies of nostalgia toward helping to structure his scientific thought. Darwin's retrospections ground his perceptions of what is at hand in his observations; flora and fauna are referred to English flora and fauna, landscapes newly encountered to familiar English landscapes: “The nostalgic eye that turns to regard what is left behind cannot help but indulge comparison and let the past emerge as the legitimizing referent” (16). Against this structuring capacity of memory, however, nostalgia also imposes the threat of forgetfulness, which Darwin faces continually as he encounters new phenomena: “Darwin fears that the accumulating richness and variety of what he sees in his travels will stifle remembrance. Like the multitude of white butterflies that early in the voyage surround the *Beagle* and with their dense splendor block the view, the plethora of images threatens to hinder his remembrance of what has gone by and will pass before him” (19). Accordingly, Darwin envies the Argentinian gauchos, who can fill in a “whole history” from a horse's tracks and thereby “obstruct forgetfulness's intrusion” and close the gap between residual signs and their absent, past referents (21).

Yet, precisely because he is attuned to its eroding potential, forgetfulness also enables Darwin to recollect what is essential: “the spaces created by the periods of forgetfulness between nostalgic episodes make it possible to filter memory to reveal what is important and powerful” (25). Darwin’s scientific drive and duty to identify, classify, and label specimens eventually will confer an aura on the objects of his study, make them signs of what Darwin experienced: “Through nostalgia’s perspective, the single butterfly isolated in a case absorbs into itself its former complicated and amazing habitat” (26), without that environment’s contingent distractions. As counter to the enervating force associated with homesickness in travelers from Odysseus on, Darwin’s nostalgia “seems to have spurred his sensitivity both to oblivion and its attendant questions,” so that Darwin’s reactions to the experience of nostalgia make him proactive in his critical scientific work: “As if laying stepping stones across the River Lethe, he places names on each item and secures what otherwise might fade and disappear” (22).

The writer’s situation between an escaping past and a future that threatens memory’s erosion is one in which Stevenson, even more acutely and pervasively than Darwin, repeatedly found himself. Indeed, from the more than three full chapters Colley devotes to Stevenson one might conclude that Stevenson was “at home” only in nostalgia, so much do vivid memories of his past in Scotland and particularly his childhood there inform the present of his writing. Colley shows this is true not only of the last years of his life, the period from 1888 to his death in Samoa in 1894, during which time Stevenson never returned to Scotland, or, indeed, left the Pacific, but also of his life before that voluntary exile. A wonderful chapter on *A Child’s Garden of Verses* (1884) suggests that the telos of Stevenson’s yearning was not simply a specific time or place but a certain freedom of being; as Colley puts it, when Stevenson “wished to be released from the dualities inherent in the experience of the present, he often turned his attention to the absorbing spaces of his childhood and attempted to re-enter their flexible and synthetic landscape” (107), a landscape evoked in many of the poems, whenever the child-speaker, however physically confined, imagines himself as part of what Colley calls the “ubiquitous” body of the child, freely moving into spaces and beings far from the immediate. One should note that Stevenson “went” to *Treasure Island* (1883) well before he went to the South Seas, and that the book’s adventure elaborates from Stevenson’s imaginary play on a treasure map he drew one “rainy highland day” in “Miss M’Gregor’s cottage” (161). Stevenson imagines *Treasure Island* from Scotland, as he will later, conversely, imagine Scotland from Samoa. The two locales converge, for instance, in an 1893 letter to Sidney Colvin, which Colley quotes: “It pours with rain from the westward, very unusual kind of weather; I was standing out on the little veranda [at Vailima] in front of my room this morning, and there went through me or over me a

heave of extraordinary and apparently baseless emotion. I literally staggered. And then the explanation came, and I knew I had found a frame of mind and body that belonged to Scotland, and particularly to the neighbourhood of Callander" (66). As much as Stevenson obviously enjoyed the islands, and as much as he needed their climate for his health, he could never experience the present of Samoa without vestiges—and literally vestments—of his Scottish past, as Colley pointedly notes: Stevenson "imported thirty-seven cases of furniture and belongings from his houses in Bournemouth and Edinburgh and placed them in Vailima, his home in Samoa. The chairs, tables, and silver services from Skerryvore and 17 Heriot Row stood as incongruously in the light of the tropical sun as did the Samoan servants who, under Stevenson's orders, on Sundays and other holidays, dressed in striped blazers and Royal Stewart Tartan skirts (an adaptation of the Samoan *lava-lavas*)" (61).

Interestingly, Stevenson's fondness for retrospection does not seem to have blinded him but rather to have sharpened his sensitivity to seeing. Colley acknowledges that Stevenson's nostalgia could lead him to the sometimes falsifying abstraction of nationalism; his "yearning for the people and the landscape of home frequently turned into composite expressions of nationalism that abridged or obstructed rather than separated experience," appearing to dissolve the dualities that retrospection entails (64). Yet she also points out that Stevenson's experience of recollection more typically tended to the complex, one train of thought crossing another, leaving him uncomfortable with others' less qualified patriotic expressions: "Stevenson readily acknowledged the Janus-like glances of the nostalgic moment and simultaneously engaged what is and what was or recalled what had been both painful and blissful, terrifying and golden" (55). Stevenson's remembered world of childhood, for instance, is not merely idyllic; it is marked also by an enjoyment of vicarious violence, as Colley notes.

For Stevenson, recollection is "not merely a looking back; it is also a commitment to a particular way of seeing" (157), which, if *honest* seeing, usually involves ambivalences, ambiguities, dualities, contradictions. Colley illustrates Stevenson's complex ways of seeing in a remarkable section that lists and analyzes the optical metaphors to which Stevenson habitually turned: the magic lantern, the kaleidoscope, the mirror and, most intriguingly to me, the thaumatrope (an "apparatus . . . composed of a card with different pictures on opposite sides which when twirled rapidly, with the aid of strings, combined to form a single image") (168). All of these devices share a reliance on the contrast of differences—between absence and presence, light and darkness, one image and the next—inherent in nostalgia but also, as it turns out, in the act of figured writing: the thaumatrope "brings both sides—the image that is present and the one that is absent—into view. It does something analogous to metaphor, for through its oscillation it brings what is near together with what

is elsewhere and creates a kind of synthesis which otherwise is unavailable" (170). In other words, the instruments Stevenson uses to talk about retro-spection again reveal nostalgic vision to be complicating and creative.

If Colley's book went no further than to illuminate how nostalgia and recollection shape consciousness and writing in figures like Darwin and Stevenson, it would be valuable. Intriguingly, however, Colley follows the threads of nostalgia's tendencies into more potentially controversial theoretical regions, notably in the chapter entitled "Rooms without Mirrors: The Childhood Interiors of Ruskin, Pater, and Stevenson." Colley focuses here on three writers who, in trying to "re-enter the rooms of their youth, . . . dwell not only upon their idiosyncratic relationship to the interiors of their childhood but also upon how a consciousness of one's physical being defines the sense of one's surroundings" (124). Not surprisingly, these writers' reflections reveal a distinction between how the child experiences these spaces and how the adult reflects upon them; indeed, it is reflection precisely that is necessary to the adult but not the child. More surprising is Colley's observation that in all three writers' descriptions of childhood spaces, the "mirror's reflecting and revealing eye is notably absent, for the child in their texts does not require its integrating attendance—its way of digesting and making complete the area and contents of a room, its way of bringing interiors and exteriors together. . . . The child does not need to see its image in the mirror to gain a sense of totality, to understand, rightly or wrongly, a feeling of coherence, and especially to develop a sense of self that distinguishes it from others" (138). It is only the reflecting adult who has need of the mirror to recapture and represent the child: the writers "must pick up the looking glass of their autobiographical texts in an attempt to re-integrate or reclaim themselves" (143); the childhood spaces evoked in those texts are ones into which the subject/body is welcomed, received, integrated, absorbed, rather than one from which it is distanced or alienated.

One thing this suggests to Colley is that the childhood domains evoked by Ruskin, Pater, and Stevenson are ones in which the laws of Lacan's *stade du miroir* (mirror stage) expressly do not apply: "for these children, the mirror, whether real or metaphoric/symbolic, is not the necessary attendant to their sense of identity and relation" and the "subsequent work to reclaim a wholeness that the reflected image has divided is irrelevant. Their embeddedness in themselves and their interiors obviates that necessity. In their youth, because they are not spectators of themselves, the mirror is not a factor in their relationship with themselves, their rooms, and with others around them. It is simply not present" (143). While Colley's point cannot be taken as a refutation of Lacan, it does amount to a strong qualifier: through the eyes of the child Ruskin, Pater, or Stevenson, what Lacan calls the "Imaginary"—the realm in which the child richly experiences his body but not as an alienated entity or

one that has its integrity and coherence outside himself, as is the case in Lacan's mirror stage—persists well into childhood, if it is not fully the condition of childhood. Though they experience the body and its surrounding spaces diversely, Colley's child subjects all have a reassuring imaginative access to them that is not available to Lacan's children after a very early age and is decidedly not available to any adults save through the mirror of retrospection. The world as the child is imagined to experience it thus becomes implicitly from Colley's perspective a category of consciousness that develops in opposition to the split subjectivity that Lacan sees as inevitably the human situation and that Colley sees as the situation more exclusively of the retrospective adult writer, who needs the mirror as Perseus needs his shield. The "text's deflecting mirror protects [these writers] from an unmediated confrontation with their former selves. . . . Like nostalgia itself, this mirror keeps them away from a direct sighting of the past, and, through that act, prevents what lives in their memory from dying" (148). Colley's contention that the autobiographical writers need the aid and protection of the mirror implies the formidable autonomy and force of the remembered against what is present.

One trick of the sort of falsifying nostalgia we are prone to and that Colley develops her understanding of nostalgia against is to romanticize past times and places. Colley's two chapters centering on visual arts subtly register the degrees to which the artist's techniques and chosen subject focus can mask the expression of the exiles' loss. Colley contrasts, for instance, Ford Madox Brown's *The Last of England* (1855) with Richard Redgrave's *The Emigrants' Last Sight of Home* (1858), showing the latter to be much more a view of home through rose-colored glasses than the former, which Colley aptly compares to the double images designed for viewing through a stereoscope, but that, in the painting's case, fail to converge or synthesize. The emigrants' experience as Brown conveys it is one of cold disconnection between figures—notably husband and wife—and obsessive fragmentation, as opposed to the warm, reassuring, but finally false "farewell embrace" depicted in Redgrave's painting. Though Brown's painting confronts the disorientation of its subjects in a way Redgrave's does not, Colley sees both paintings as falling short of what might be called a "full" representation of the emptiness of loss. To suggest what the paintings do not accomplish, Colley includes a discussion of Ovid's *Tristia*, poems written from his exile, which, though jarringly outside the period of her book's focus, works to suggest what a less compromised portrayal of loss is like.

For Colley, the workings of memory through visual art are more tellingly revealed in the evolution of the etching-engravings of J.M.W. Turner, to which she devotes most of her book's closing chapter. Colley follows Ruskin in wanting to show that "Turner, 'assuredly' more than most artists, consciously and unconsciously beckoned remembrance to initiate, develop and modify his

pictures' images"; that Turner "recollected rather than imagined his compositions," and that "his prints, therefore, do not replicate a factual accuracy; they portray, instead, the impressions of memory" (197). It is as if Turner uses memories of images or image-motifs to fill out, improve, or revise the representing picture. As Colley quotes Bergson, Turner's process is an instance of memory's "gnawing itself" into the present and the future and developing into active recollection: "involuntary remembrances" are allowed to "modify the more consciously recalled and reworked images" (194, 199). Interestingly, Colley shows how details that initially appear on the prints' margins work themselves into prominence as the engravings are revised, and this increasing stress on the peripheral, of course, reveals the true machinery of memory: "The resilience of the marginal pieces reminds one that a remembrance of something often elevates or emphasizes what had in the initial experience seemed less important. . . . These moments can unseat the dominant image" (201).

As engaging as Colley shows the operations of nostalgia and recollection to be in the thought and work of her subjects, one comes away from her book with the clear impression that nostalgia works exceptionally in exceptional thinkers. She does not at all argue that the falsifying and limiting modes of nostalgia mentioned at the outset of this writing were not operative in Victorian culture, and she certainly acknowledges nostalgia's lures toward sentimentality for the Victorians. That comes across most clearly in her chapter on Elizabeth Gaskell's fiction, where, through an argument amply supported with evidence from the full range of Gaskell's works, Colley shows that many of Gaskell's characters, though certainly prone to nostalgia and longing for a world outside the alienating, disconcerting, frenetically changing urban environments in which they find themselves, have or develop the capacity to "create new maps" for themselves. Gaskell does not minimize the disorienting, disturbing facts of her characters' lives, but she also shows their resourcefulness and resilience in enlisting their powers of memory and awareness that things have been and can be other than they are to negotiate the present. Crucially for Colley's argument, Gaskell did not sentimentalize or yield to the illusive attractions of the English pastoral idyll, as Colley shows the painter Helen Allingham did, repeatedly and profitably, in her charming but sanitized depictions of country cottages where "smoke curls reassuringly from the chimney" (80). Gaskell and her strong characters typically resist such sentimentality, though the contemporary appeal of paintings like Allingham's and, one must say, portions of Dickens' fiction, which Colley does not discuss, leaves one with the uneasy feeling that the Victorians were as ready as we are to give in to a nostalgia that is narcotic rather than stimulating, cozy rather than challenging. The strength of Colley's book is not that it shows how vulnerable Victorians were to the "golden glow" of the past, as humans of all time

are, but how particular thinkers were able to struggle with nostalgia, like Odysseus in his bonds before the Sirens' lure, and wrest from recollection creative ways to construe and construct the present and future.

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*The Linguistic Turn in Hermeneutic Philosophy* by Cristina Lafont, translated by José Medina. Cambridge, Mass., and London, England: The MIT Press, 1999. Pp. xviii + 377. \$45.00.

With *The Linguistic Turn in Hermeneutic Philosophy* Cristina Lafont confronts both Anglo-American and German reflections on language. According to Lafont, even though critics tend to stress the differences between the two traditions, with the German tradition analyzing natural languages and emphasizing language as a means of understanding (not just as a vehicle of knowledge), both traditions lead to similar problems, such as linguistic relativism. Reopening the classic question of reason's relation to language, Lafont tries to put an end to extreme forms of linguistic relativism and linguistic reification, which she sees as dangerous, but not necessary, results of "the linguistic turn." In fact, she repeatedly emphasizes that her agenda is to "preserve the linguistic turn while nevertheless calling into question . . . the thesis that meaning determines reference" (225). The author analyzes the linguistic turn in the German tradition of the philosophy of language to critique and extend Habermas's theory of communicative rationality. In an effort to defend a workable theory of communicative rationality, she argues that language has both a "world-disclosing function," a constitutive role in our interpretive experiences of objective and subjective worlds, and a "referential function," a capacity enabling us to refer to an objective world independently of our different interpretations of that world. In spite of a tendency to repeat herself, Lafont has written a significant contribution to the ongoing debates concerning meaning and reference.

According to Lafont, the linguistic turn in the German tradition of the philosophy of language begins in the "Hamann-Herder-Humboldt" tradition, a tradition that emphasizes the "world-disclosing" function of language. A shared thesis of this tradition is that "linguistic expressions are held to determine, if not what there is, at least what there *can be* for a linguistic community—what such a community *can say* (i.e., *believe*) that there is" (xii); in other words, for writers in this tradition, meaning determines reference. If so, Lafont asks, how can we gain knowledge about reality? Her answer is that lan-

guage can take us beyond what we believe because it can refer. If a particular description of a referent turns out to be wrong, she claims, we can learn from our mistakes and change our description. Indeed, by developing what she calls (borrowing terminology from Hilary Putnam) an “internal realist” strategy, Lafont hopes to retain a realist perspective, which emphasizes normative elements in our cognitive actions, within a pragmatist strategy, which emphasizes interpretive and creative elements in those actions.

Starting with Hamann, Lafont shows how the German tradition takes issue with the classical instrumental view of language as a mere tool for designating independently existing objects; language does not supply names that designate such objects. In Lafont’s account, the German tradition believes that language constitutes thought. From this perspective, we cannot even think without being involved in an already given language, and we can critique any philosophy of consciousness that elevates reason to a transcendental state (for reason cannot be removed from and cannot come before language). In turn, Lafont critiques the “Hamann-Herder-Humboldt” tradition, showing how the thesis that meaning determines reference leads to the reification of language. In other words, she claims that once words designate concepts instead of independent objects, when all reference is indirect, the function of language is reduced to its constitutive character, its “world-disclosing” function. In short, language’s “referential” function gets lost.

Lafont argues that Heidegger and Gadamer sustain the thesis that meaning determines reference, with Heidegger placing language’s world-disclosing function before its pragmatic aspects. Gadamer continues the hermeneutic focus on the world-disclosing function of language, but, for Lafont, Gadamer provides a complex model of conversation absent in the work of his predecessors. As Lafont explains, the “understanding toward which a conversation is directed is always an understanding *with someone and about something*” (97). In this hermeneutic sense, we leave ourselves open to another person’s claim, and if understanding is possible in a particular situation, there is a presupposition of solidarity. In Lafont’s analysis, if we stress the social character of language, the defining feature of language becomes intersubjectivity; that is, people participate in the activity of language, an activity that is part of a complex dialogic process of understanding.

The first section of the book, comprising some one hundred pages, provides a clear, readable narrative of what Lafont sees as the main features of the German tradition of the philosophy of language. Moreover, this section provides Lafont with a historical background against which to situate Habermas’s conceptions of language, conceptions that Lafont explicates and critiques for the rest of her book. Lafont is determined to give both the communicative dimension and the cognitive dimension of language their due; indeed, she consistently refers to her central argument that we should no longer defend

the reification of language as world-disclosure. Instead, she argues for the use of current theories of “direct reference” to bring the designative (“referential”) function of language back into play. Accordingly, Lafont finds in Habermas’s later thought a dialectic “between an intersubjectivity to be produced through communication, and an intersubjectivity always already produced, thanks to the ‘lifeworld’ shared by speakers” (126). From this perspective, she maintains, we can acknowledge that our relationship with the world is symbolically mediated.

Lafont deftly shows how Habermas continues to rely on hermeneutic premises (from Gadamer); however, when she asserts Habermas’s differences from Gadamer, she overstates the case a bit. For example, she claims that Habermas “simply underscores the reflective and critical potential of the communication oriented toward understanding, a potential entirely disregarded by Gadamer” (137). Here, the word “entirely” does not cohere with her own more sophisticated analysis of Gadamer given in the book’s first section. But Lafont also usefully takes us through many years of Habermas’s writings and shows how his reliance on a “lifeworld,” a holistic concept of shared presuppositions, does not appear to agree with some of his other more universalist claims. In other words, Lafont’s agenda is to show how a hermeneutic component to Habermas’s philosophy cannot account for how we understand the meaning of what someone says. For example, Lafont claims, Habermas presumes that we share implied background knowledge that we cannot reduce to propositions; but because we cannot formalize this holistic knowledge, then counter to Habermas’s intent, we cannot isolate “the acceptability conditions of speech acts from the background knowledge that determines these conditions and thus makes possible the understanding of speech acts” (223).

Lafont uses the issue of learning as a limit case to test her strategy: can a philosophy of language explain how we learn through language? To accomplish this task, she analyzes the referential and cognitive use of language to show how language contains within itself the possibility of revising itself (so we can change, learn, and correct previous knowledge). After much abstraction intended to show how referential uses contain possibilities of revisibility, Lafont moves to specific examples in her lively and clear examination of K. Donnellan’s distinction between “attributive” and “referential” uses of definite descriptions. An “attributive” description is essential for doing something; it is irreplaceable. A “referential” description is but one of many ways to accomplish the same job. For Lafont, Donnellan’s distinction helps us understand that the classic theory of reference only applies to the “attributive” use. In the act of redescribing something, hearers can agree to the existence of the referent, but disagree about the specific way the speaker describes that referent; a theory of indirect reference cannot, Lafont asserts, account for this possibility.

In order to learn, we must have the possibility for cognitive disagreement; we must learn the referential use of language.

Lafont relies heavily on the writings of Hilary Putnam to explain her ideas of reference, revisibility, and learning. When she analyzes the Anglo-American tradition though, she extends Habermas's conceptions of language and communicative rationality without thoroughly engaging the other figures of German philosophy she analyzed in the first section of her book. That is, the book's title, which emphasizes "hermeneutic philosophy," might be misleading to readers who expect more direct comparisons between Putnam and, say, Heidegger and Gadamer. In the preface to the English edition, Lafont herself states that she "added a new, third part . . . [which] entails passing outside the domain of the philosophy of language" (xviii). Perhaps this explains why a potentially fascinating contrast between Gadamer and Humboldt is left to fewer than two paragraphs (267).

Lafont does, however, provide a useful exposition of Putnam, who argues, among other things, that so-called natural kind terms are not definable. For example, a three-legged tiger is still a tiger (what matters is that the three-legged tiger might be an abnormal member of the class "tigers," but it is still a "tiger"). Unlike the traditional theory of reference, which "seems to render scientific progress [revisibility] impossible" (260), a new theory of reference needs to deal with revisable descriptions. Lafont claims that we can defend Habermas's theory of communicative rationality by developing a strategy of "internal realism" from a pragmatist point of view—that is, showing how the "referential" function of language already has a built-in capacity for rationality.

Lafont turns to Habermas's discourse ethics to deal with the problem of justification, for discourse ethics "only explains the conditions *under which alone* those criteria (arguments, reasons, and the like) can achieve *justificatory force*" (319). In other words, in a discursive situation, we can only infer the correctness of our claims based on whether they are convincing or not; we are justified in following the "unforced force of the better argument." Lafont thus adopts the position that we cannot explain truth or moral rightness in so-called epistemic terms because while discourse ethics does try to provide absolute criteria for creating morally right norms, it does not provide us with substantive content. Instead, discourse ethics tries to explain the internal relation between rational acceptability and moral rightness. Realist (or "referential") presuppositions, as Lafont explains the case, have no "epistemic" content. If we follow her interpretation of Habermas's thought, Lafont asserts that we can acquire a useful rule of argumentation; there is no guarantee (no sufficient condition) for moral rightness itself. From this perspective, rational acceptability is thus a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for moral rightness.

The drive to defend Habermas's position again appears when Lafont's own language places into the margins issues that might otherwise be quite significant to her topic; indeed, at times, the footnotes toward the end of the book overwhelm the print on top of the page. For example, a discussion of Rawls's theory of justice appears in detailed footnotes on pages 344-47; Lafont records Habermas's own remarks on Rawls in the body of her text, but the footnotes on these four pages compete for position and significance with the (proportionally smaller) text on top of the page. It is unclear why such an interesting discussion of sufficient criteria for justice in Rawls does not belong in the main text of Lafont's book.

In the larger argument of the book, however, Lafont's point is that "(dis-cursive) rational acceptability is the only acceptable necessary condition for moral justification" (347). Lafont arrives at this claim by relying on a number of either/or postulations. As Lafont states, by "using the oppositions true/false or morally right/morally wrong (just/unjust), we thereby commit ourselves to accepting that the statement at issue is *either true or false*, that the norm is *either just or unjust*" (350). At such moments, we might want to know how the Continental figures discussed in the earlier parts of her book (or a poststructuralist) might respond. We can sense, however, that Lafont needs to articulate these positions in precisely this way (binary notions with a single right answer) so she can show how a "realist strategy can make ethical pluralism compatible with moral universalism" (351). Here, Lafont again relies on Putnam, who claims that seemingly "incompatible words may actually describe the same situation or event or the same physical system" (353). What different sentences, different interpretations, have in common is reference ("the same situation"). Thus, we can have epistemic pluralism without necessarily having relativism; there are different descriptions, but they are of the "the same event." A presupposition here, as Lafont acknowledges, is that there are certain common, generalizable interests among all human beings—what is "equally in everyone's interest." Since, according to Lafont, there appear to be such generalizable interests, we can "in principle find norms able to preserve these interests" (359).

Although at times Lafont's own abstract language and penchant for lengthy quotations interfere with the presentation of her argument, by the end of the book she has explicated multiple traditions for the benefit of her larger argument and has asked us to remember that no matter how much we need language to understand our world, we should not neglect the reality of the world that is not language. Lafont writes best when she has a story to tell.

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*Closed Encounters: Literary Politics and Public Culture* by Jeffrey Wallen. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. Pp. 232. \$47.95 cloth; \$18.75 paper.

On October 27, 1992 in Paris, as part of one of the many speeches that the much admired intellectual-politician-playwright Václav Havel was invited to give after the fall of communism and his simultaneous rise as a leading public figure, the former Czech president chose to talk about “the phenomenon of waiting”:

There are different ways of waiting.

At one end of the great spectrum there is waiting for Godot, who embodies universal salvation. For many of us who lived in the communist world, waiting was something very close to this extreme position. (. . .) But Godot—at least as one who is expected—will not come, because he simply doesn't exist. He only represents hope. He is not hope itself, but an illusion. He is the product of our own helplessness, a patch over a hole in the spirit. The patch itself is full of holes. It is the hope of people without hope.

On the other end of the spectrum there is waiting of another kind: that is, patience. For us this waiting was based on the knowledge that it made sense on principle to resist by speaking the truth simply because it was the right thing to do, without speculating whether it would lead somewhere tomorrow, or the day after, or ever. (. . .) It also, of course, grew out of the faith—but this is of secondary importance—that a seed once sown would one day take root and send forth a shoot. No one knew when. But it would happen someday, perhaps for future generations.

This stance—for simplicity's sake, let us call it the dissident stance—assumed and cultivated patience. It taught us how to wait. It taught us waiting as patience, waiting as a state of hope, not as an expression of hopelessness. Whereas waiting for Godot is a meaningless form of self-deception and therefore a waste of time, this second type of waiting does have meaning; it is not a sweet lie but a bitter truth, and time spent in this kind of waiting is not wasted. To wait until good seeds sprout is not the same as waiting for Godot. Waiting for Godot means waiting for lilies we have never planted to grow.

I should make it clear that citizens of the communist world could not be divided into dissidents and those who merely waited for Godot. To a certain extent, all of us waited for Godot at times, and at other times were dissidents. It's just that some of us might have been more the former, and others more the latter.

Nevertheless, this experience can be simplified to the recognition that there are different kinds of waiting. (Václav Havel, *The Art of the Impossible: Politics as Morality in Practice*, trans. Paul Wilson et al. [New York: Fromm International, 1998], 103-5.)

Note how the reader has precisely to wait until the last paragraph to hear what the truth is about the two kinds of waiting person: the one who waits passively and the other who waits while actively repeating (an unspecified) truth. The truth is, Havel insists (“I should make it clear”), that it is unclear now, as it presumably was back then, before 1989, just who the bad and good “waiters” were: who was wasting time and who was nobly pursuing a patient exercise of truth? Is this a case of undecidability? Certainly Havel teaches us to acknowledge different kinds of waiting, but he himself admits that his distinction is of only limited usefulness in judging specific cases (“It’s just that some of us *might* have been more the former, and others more the latter”).

One could say more about this short dissertation on waiting, or about Havel’s prestige (like Frederick Douglass’s or Primo Levi’s) as survivor and witness, about his choice to address these remarks to a French audience in late October of 1992, or his reasons for speaking of lilies and not, say, daffodils or tulips. One of the most able commentators of this textual event would be Jeffrey Wallen and next in line would be an attentive, patient reader of his book, *Closed Encounters: Literary Politics and Public Culture*. Wallen’s Godot is *good* (i.e., genuine, honest, frank, critical, etc.) dialogue. Waiting for *good dialogue*, he says, has become the favorite activity (or passivity) of many Western politicians, journalists, and university professors who have no better idea of how to address the “breakdown in other forms of community, citizenship, and public involvement.” Wallen sends the reader who cannot come up with his own examples of this breakdown to Christopher Lasch’s account in *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* and adds this remark that recalls Havel’s characterization of waiting for Godot as “a patch over a hole in the spirit”: “Dialogue is being proffered as the new social glue, delivered to us through the pronouncements of politicians and media spokesmen, the ‘representatives’ of the people. It is more difficult—and more essential—to confront the holes in the social fabric that dialogue cannot repair” (180). Wallen teaches his reader to recognize different proponents of dialogue and among them those whose calls for good dialogue dodge more substantive, nondiscursive social issues and who procrastinate when it comes to thinking through and perhaps improving their own speech acts. A call for “good dialogue” or “genuine debate” or “reasoning together” is invoked “as a future endpoint, [that] gets everyone off the hook: it offers both a legitimation (everything we do is leading toward it) and an excuse (I don’t have to do it yet)” (151). Through careful and calm examinations of numerous examples taken from the essays and speeches of eminent professors in the humanities and other well-known

“public intellectuals” (e.g., Stanley Fish, Gerald Graff, Richard Rorty, Edward Said, Cornel West) Wallen reminds the reader of the old saying that “talk is cheap” and so is preaching to the converted (hence the choice of title, *Closed Encounters*, and the title of part three: “Failed Encounters: Dialogue or Chatter?”).

Wallen ranges over a daunting amount and variety of textual terrain (a bibliography of works cited, if there were one, would be very long), but his talent for defining the issue at hand and delimiting its treatment with well-chosen excerpts from the texts in question allows the reader to get the lay of the land and understand where the cruces are. Wallen is an excellent guide. He makes an effort to practice what he preaches, which is “*thinking publicly*—to think in ways that could sustain, rather than foreclose or discredit, a public discourse” (68). He does not go in for spouting or scolding from afar (like Thoreau), nor does he think the mass of men are necessarily dupes or desperate. Wallen does not patronize, or practice exclusionary fetishization of the difficult; nor, however, is he spoon-feeding or simplifying the complexity, when it arises, of the issues at hand. In a chapter entitled “Forging a Public Voice for Academic Critics” Wallen praises the exemplary career of the Victorian public intellectual T. H. Huxley, and later, perhaps still thinking of Huxley or of other hybrid thinkers (Emerson? Dewey? Orwell? Virginia Woolf?), he remarks, “It is much easier to treat others as incapable of understanding than to actively engage their ideas: to open one’s own thoughts as fully as possible to the scrutiny of others requires a high degree of clarity and of courage” (184). By refusing easy side-taking, as well as hand-wringing and fence-sitting, Wallen shows that clarity and courage can pay off.

Who is this book for? In the words of the author, it is “[f]or anyone who has been away from academia for the last ten or twenty years” (97); but it may also be of interest to academics working outside the Anglo-American context (especially since American problems have a way of becoming other people’s problems), as well as to North American academics (whether in the arts or sciences) who may have abandoned all hope of “keeping up” with the acute and chronic issues of higher education (either out of disgust, exhaustion, or bewilderment). Magazines and newspapers routinely make easy money with sensational stories that mock or fume at the scandalous (pornography in the classroom?), alarmist (the university in ruins?), and bizarre (Latino professor denied tenure for not being Latino enough?) sides of American higher education, and they make it easy to turn off and tune out until the next story (necessarily more outrageous than the last) comes along. Wallen tries to articulate higher expectations for critical thinking and discussion of the functions and purposes of the university, and he discourages racing from fire to fire to do damage control with verbal extinguishers that evade or misrepresent real problems and blame or belittle the messengers. He wants

instead “to put forward questions that will haunt incessantly the consciousness of academic critics” (14) and of ordinary citizens *outside* the academy.

What are the issues Wallen addresses? Perhaps the three most important are the fallout from postmodern challenges to traditional beliefs about truth, objectivity, and the protocols of reasonable argument; the rescue and revenge of marginality; and the fetishization of “diversity,” “otherness,” and “resistance.” Wallen’s standard procedure is to trace the development of each issue, point out its vexing challenges, expose the weak arguments or blank assertions of some of the key players in these debates, and state as precisely as he can what his own position is, and is not (the guardrail formula “I do not mean to suggest that . . .” and other similar expressions occur frequently over the course of the book). After reading Wallen, the academic and the “common reader” alike can both understand, for example, how a displacement of New Critical beliefs in “cognitive literary criticism” in favor of the pragmatist and reader response “sensitivity” to “interpretive communities” and the “constructedness” of truth could make classroom and parliamentary virtues such as “disinterestedness” or “objectivity” seem quaint if not pernicious. One can better understand how in the same year (1996) a talented professor at the Université de Montréal (Bill Readings) signs his diagnosis of higher education, *The University in Ruins*, with calls for a “dissensual community” of individuals as “singularities” instead of subjects; while five hours to the south, former Dartmouth College president James O. Freedman smiles out from the cover of his neo-humanist celebration *Idealism and Liberal Education* in which, along with praise for the heroic achievements of Václav Havel and other stars, he rather airily promotes the college’s “commitment to diversity” which he envisions as “a symphony of different persons, different cultures, different traditions, and different languages . . . pursuing differences and otherness in all of their varied dimensions” (63). The general reader also ends up better informed about the still simmering controversies over “political correctness,” “culture wars, and “identity politics” about which Wallen (like Havel) tells us some of his character-building, firsthand experience.

At the end of the third and final part of the book, Wallen reiterates his “expectations” (perhaps not quite the same thing as “hopes”):

It is a daunting but important task to create more spaces that encourage both critical thinking and dialogues that go beyond a mere stating of each person’s views. . . . The dynamics of any social space depend greatly on the expectations we bring to our interactions with others. Academic critics play an important role in crafting what we expect from discussion. Not only do acts of criticism diagnose the perturbations and significant features of our discursive fields, but they always also shape the array of possible responses. (193)

And yet, Wallen refuses to offer his own model of good dialogue in the concluding section (“Troubling the Horizon”) of the last chapter, “The Poverty of Conversation” a section which follows “Bite Size Discussions” in which Wallen challenges warm-fuzzy views of Socratic dialogue: “Socratic dialogue has nothing to do with an equal *exchange* of opinion” (224). “I will not propose my own model,” he says, “since I am not convinced that criticism, philosophy, or rigorous thinking are necessarily compatible with a model of dialogue” (177). May one conclude, then, that Wallen is still open to persuasion since he has not said that they are necessarily *incompatible* either? Perhaps. Is Wallen waiting for good dialogue? Yes, but he’s not holding his breath.

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*The Arts and Sciences of Criticism* edited by David Fuller and Patricia Waugh. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Pp. x + 265. \$39.95.

As the editors explain in their introduction, the essays in *The Arts and Sciences of Criticism* all “are in some way about what kind of knowledge literature is or claims (implicitly) to be” (1), and they also all reflect “on a debate between different models of knowledge—a science model and its place in the university versus other ways of conceiving knowledge for which the arts have traditionally been seen as vehicles but which the science model makes currently problematic” (1). At a time when the coherence and the mission of the university are very much in doubt when the humanities are widely seen to be in crisis, and when market pressures govern most decisions in the university, these topics are of central importance. Is there a unifying model of knowledge (or an “idea of the university”) that unites the humanities, the natural sciences, and the social sciences? Are there instead different models of knowledge for each division of the university? Or is knowledge, tautologically, simply what the leading professors in each field declare it to be? Now that universities increasingly put themselves forward as “markets in knowledge,” these questions are particularly urgent for the humanities. Do we supply any knowledge at all for our customers/students, or just “cultural capital” with a declining value?

This collection of essays unfortunately does not provide many compelling responses to these questions, and it quickly becomes apparent that the debate between a science model and an aesthetic or humanistic (and these are hardly synonymous) model of knowledge is not a major concern for

most of the contributors. The real project of this volume is to promote “a specifically aesthetic way of knowing” (1) against all forms of literary criticism that claim to provide other modes of knowledge. Science functions here primarily as the means to attack and discredit the major challenger within literary studies to an “aesthetic way of knowing”—literary theory. In the first of the three sections of the book, “Criticism and the History and Philosophy of Science,” most of the essays aim to separate literature and science by denouncing literary theory as a false bridge between aesthetic experience and scientific cognition; they also attempt to debunk any claims to knowledge for literary theory by showing how theorists poach on science yet fail to meet any of the evidential standards of science (the editors would have done well to heed the first sentence of Paul Fry’s essay later in the collection “Literary theory is for the most part a thing of the past”). Jacques Berthoud, for example, argues that Lacan’s famous claim that the unconscious is “structured in the most radical way like a language” (96) has no “scientific” validity. What startling news!

Instead of strong, careful arguments exploring the different ways of knowing between science, literature, and literary criticism, we get the dyspeptic screeds of the philosopher David Cooper and the geriatrician Raymond Tallis (the one scientist in the collection) that are supposed to convince us that literary theory is fraudulent and pseudo-scientific. Tallis argues that in our weak, prescientific state, literature professors easily fall prey to “fashions led by charismatics and charlatans,” and accept uncritically “the evidence-free assertions of the founders of Theory” (75). His language is indebted to Max Nordau’s attack on “degeneration” at the time of the last fin de siècle, and he even suggests that literature professors are primitive creatures, frozen in time (“The contrast, when one moves from clinical science to Theory, is such that it is difficult to believe the two pursuits belong to the same stage of evolution of the human species” [78]). He states that “it has always been possible to ‘get away with murder’ in a discipline that has no tradition of adequately testing general statements” (75)—the real crime of literary theorists is venturing beyond their “demesne.” He argues that we should go back to producing “narrowly focused” studies of individual works and refrain from making “large-scale statements” unless we are able to support them with “properly designed large-scale empirical enquiries” (93—clinical drug trials are his model for such “evidence-based” enquiries).

David Cooper’s essay serves the same function of censuring literary theorists who “soften any sharp contrast between scientific and literary understanding” or who make “those ultra-radical pronouncements which in effect equate science with literary criticism” (67). His message is that we should stay on our side of the knowledge divide, and not offer any challenges to notions of truth, reference, and objectivity (which in his view underpin scientific knowledge) since this would only “sacrifice what is enduring and

valuable for what is fashionable and meretricious" and would "rubbish the ordinary and very ancient thinking of the human race" (70). Leave any challenges to "ordinary and very ancient thinking" to scientists!

I am not pushing for an eradication of the boundaries between art and science; only for a thoughtful and genuine consideration of these "different models of knowledge." But what happens if we follow the tendency of the book and, along with Patricia Waugh (one of the co-editors), "resist the easy seductions of the new scientized aesthetic" (47) (she argues that Jean-Francois Lyotard [a stand-in for all of postmodern theory] "aestheticizes science" by confusing scientific and aesthetic indeterminacy [43]); agree "to continue some form of the Kantian separation of the categories of knowledge" (43; a careful reading of his *Conflict of the Faculties* might complicate the lines of her divisions); and dismiss any challenges that contemporary theory poses to "the existence and value of a specifically aesthetic kind of knowing" (50)? What modes of knowledge do we gain once we return to "the kinds of understanding of intentional consciousness, of unique experience, of feeling, of cultural embodiment and value which have traditionally been the demesne of literary culture" (47)?

The second section, "Criticism and the Aesthetic," seems to be the real point of the book: once we have dismissed any aspirations that literary criticism might have to scientific or theoretical knowledge, we can go back (or forward) to exploring the experience of the aesthetic, the true domain of art and literature. None of the essays directly take on the project of articulating the nature of aesthetic experience or of a "specifically aesthetic way of knowing" (or for that matter, engage with the vast literature on these topics), but they often do contain insights about "the experience of literature." Doris Lessing provides some intriguing ideas about the difference between writing novels and autobiographies, and about the continual changes that go on in both the reader and the writer. David Lodge gives an excellent sketch of the relationships between literary criticism and literary creation, and some of his remarks about the "difficulty of understanding the nature of literary creation" (150) are especially astute. Paul Fry's contribution, "Beneath Interpretation," more directly addresses the ways in which literature might be a different mode of knowing, through his claims that "literature is that form of discourse which is not exhausted by interpretation" (179), and that "what remains in literature, and only in literature, when interpretation has exhausted meaning is an underdetermination of predication (I have elsewhere called it the ostensive moment of the literary) which not only defies interpretation but constitutes its critique" (166). This might offer a promising alternative to critics who promote aesthetic experience as the resistance to interpretation.

Although the essays in this section (by Michael O'Neill and David Fuller as well) contain fine moments, they certainly do not add up to a grounding

or an elaboration of a “specifically aesthetic way of knowing.” Moreover, the essays suffer when they attempt to promote such a mode of knowledge, as in each case this is achieved either by embracing forms of not knowing, or by generalizing a minor example into a universal aesthetic truth. Doris Lessing uses a passage from Goethe to promote “a certain passivity in reading taking what the author is offering, and not what the reader thinks he should be offering, not imposing himself (herself) between the author and what should be emanating from the author” (162-63). Taken to the limit, and it seems that she wishes we do so, aesthetic knowing is to be achieved by repressing all other forms of knowledge (and Goethe’s injunction “to weigh in what relation it [a book] stands to our own inner nature” becomes a plea for reading passively only through a very “active” type of reading). David Fuller, the other co-editor, goes furthest in this direction, arguing that we “scale down the pretensions which scholarship and criticism claim for their necessary but (as Blake puts it) inferior kind of knowing” and “reinstate the thoroughly interiorized mode of knowledge of the rhapsode” (194). Fuller appeals for the restoration of the sacred dimensions of awe, mystery, and intoxication to the experience of art, but he does not get very far in exploring or conveying a “superior kind of knowing,” and rests content with such weak conclusions as “the reader [of a poem] has to strike some relationship between trusting the words in themselves, being a quasi-anonymous vehicle, while also using all the resources of feeling and understanding that exist in his or her own vocal being” (196). Shutting down the Socratic questioning of the rhapsode (Fuller refers to Plato’s *Ion*) and retreating inward will not take us very far along the path of intoxication, knowledge, or ecstasy, which require instead that we shatter the comforting boundaries of subjectivity. Patricia Waugh suggests that Virginia Woolf succeeds in combining “the perspective of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of that same world, the person and the view included” (she is quoting from Thomas Nagel’s *The View from Nowhere*), and that only “in art do we have this kind of experience. and that is the unique knowledge which it has to offer” (51-52). Yet Waugh is unpersuasive both when asserting that Woolf’s “structure” and “metacommentary” provide a “view from nowhere” and when equating this view with “the world of science” (56); what exceeds any individual perspective is not necessarily “from nowhere” nor “scientific.” More importantly, Waugh offers no support for extending her insights about Woolf’s modernist practice (“the simultaneous apprehension of experience and the idea of it” [59] experiencing “for ourselves the problem of knowledge” [57]) to all of literature and art. Much of this book reads like a defense of modernism against postmodern art and literature; Michael Bell’s “The Metaphysics of Modernism” is another example.

The one essay to avoid these tendencies of hoping to save literary studies through some form of retreat—away from science, theory, skepticism,

postmodernism, and the pressures of contemporary university life—is Timothy Clark’s “Literature and the Crisis in the Concept of the University,” the best essay in the collection (from the final section, “Criticism and the Ethical”). Departing from Bill Readings’s *The University in Ruins*, Clark explores the ways “in which English has legitimized itself in relation to both the university and to society as a whole” (226), and he convincingly argues that there is no avenue of aesthetic redemption that will save the English department. As opposed to Sean Burke (“The Aesthetic, the Cognitive, and the Ethical”), who responds to “a crisis in our distinctions between the realms of the aesthetic, cognitive, and the ethical” by promoting his own particular clan of dialecticians and philosophers who would subject “all products of science . . . to philosophical and ethical interrogation before being allowed to circulate as discoveries in society at large” (214-15), Clark argues that “we cannot go back to old and discredited dreams of general cultural legislation” (235). In his efforts to rethink the distinctions that have traditionally structured the university and to conceive a future for literary studies within “the modern professionalized university,” Clark offers only some preliminary ideas: “a much closer consideration of ways of engaging the media, and forms of genuine public relations,” “continued de-nationalizing of literature,” and “general discussion on the idea—or ideas—of the university as a whole” (236, 237). Perhaps the editors, in a further attempt to address the role of literature and literary criticism, will use Clark’s insight that “the cultural mission of the humanities has become an anachronism” (235) as the starting point for a new collection of essays.

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*Origins of Democratic Culture: Printing, Petitions, and the Public Sphere in Early-Modern England* by David Zaret. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000. Pp. xv + 291. \$45.00.

A review by a historian of a book by a sociologist in a journal concerned with literary and cultural criticism indicates some of the problems and possibilities of interdisciplinary convergence. Although we share common interests we are driven by different theoretical concerns, and our recapitulation of each other’s work exposes us to the risk of being wrong-footed. In this case, a historian may be inclined to applaud David Zaret’s sociological exploration of early modern English political culture, while wishing that he wrote more

like a historian, knew more about the English past, and had greater currency with the most recent work in our discipline.

*Origins of Democratic Culture* makes several interesting arguments. First, the author observes that conditions of political excitement, energized discourse, and commercial printing existed in England a century or more before their emergence in the classic “public sphere” as imagined by Jürgen Habermas. English political culture was discursively precocious, and as early as the 1530s included opinionated interactions among the political classes and wide-ranging circulation of political news. A century later, on the eve of the English Revolution, English culture exhibited signs of dialogic maturity, as gentlemen and commoners, governors and governed, debated matters of church and state through a variety of scribal and printed media. Incorporating rumor and gossip, ballads and libels, sermons and pamphlets, and proclamations and petitions, political discourse spilled across inns and taverns, courts and counting houses, as well as parliamentary chambers and courts. But despite the proliferation of print and the widespread circulation of text, political communication fell short of its democratic potential because the culture adhered to traditional modes of deference, secrecy, and privilege.

Zaret claims that the peculiar circumstances of the early 1640s transformed this communicative environment, producing the most dramatic changes of the English Revolution. More significant than short-term and reversible alterations of the constitution and religion was the novel and permanent invention of a politics of public opinion. The explosion of print that followed the abandonment of censorship in 1640 led to a new world of pamphlets answering pamphlets, text talking to text, and authors of all sorts exploiting the dialogic possibilities of the press. More works were published in the revolutionary era 1640-1660 than in the entire previous history of printing in England.

But this was just the beginning. Key to the transformation that Zaret sees as the foundation of modern democratic culture was the novel deployment in the 1640s of printed petitions on matters of national religious and political concern. English government was long accustomed to receiving petitions, nearly always in manuscript, and usually couched in deferential terms. But beginning in 1640, this traditional mode of address became co-opted by factional, partisan, and confessional antagonists who used the press and its attendant mechanisms of merchandising and publicity to appeal to “public opinion” on behalf of legislative agenda. The Houses of Parliament handled hundreds of organized petitions between 1640 and 1642 which set the model for competitive public petitioning during and after the civil wars. Traditional fictions about secrecy and privilege were jettisoned as petitions answered and crossed the petitions of rivals, and their circulation in print appealed explicitly to the rational authority of the citizenry at large.

Petitioning and printing imposed dialogic order on political conflict, reconstituting the public as audience, participants, and consumers. The upshot was the creation in mid-Stuart England of the first democratic public sphere. With its overload of signification, its “representational kaleidoscope” (179), and its “commodification of discursive production” (277), the culture of mid-Stuart England, it is suggested, had parallels to our own postmodern condition.

As a sociologist addressing disciplinary colleagues, Zaret begins with the obligatory invocation of theory. Passages acknowledging “T. H. Marshall’s account,” “Habermas’s analysis,” and the master works of Marx and Weber, frame brief discussions of bourgeois communicative practice, the underpinnings of democracy, and the emergent public sphere. Most historical sociologists apparently recognize England as the “modal case,” but few have appreciated the degree to which revisionist historical scholarship has undercut their position. Historians of the seventeenth century no longer believe in the Whig rise of liberty, inexorable processes of modernization, or in the revolutionary ideology of puritanism. Zaret, as an interlocutor between disciplines, reports the bad news with full bibliographic details. Setting aside the old paradigm, he posits the neo-Whig notion that seventeenth-century England experienced a revolution in communicative practice that opened the way for a democratic political culture. The very title tells it all.

*Origins of Democratic Culture* may provide a valuable reeducation for sociologists about early modern England, but it has little to teach historians. Although there are useful discussions here about scribal culture, the printing trade, and political communication, there is nothing to which historians will be indebted. The primary sources are familiar materials and the secondary sources cite the usual suspects. Without a bibliography it is difficult to check for omissions, but several recent and relevant works appear to have escaped the author’s attention. Zaret’s discussion of public opinion would be improved by reference to Dagmar Freist, *Governed by Opinion: Politics, Religion and the Dynamics of Communication in Stuart London, 1637-1645* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997). And his discussion of petitioning, on which his central argument depends, needs major modification in light of Judith Maltby’s *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), which includes a comprehensive analysis of pro-episcopal petitions of the 1640s. Zaret does appear to have read Bernard Capp’s *The World of John Taylor the Water-Poet, 1578-1653* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) but he persistently misattributes it to William Lamont (145). His citation of *Broadside Black-Letter Ballads*, edited by J. P. Collier, includes no caution that anything Collier touched may be contaminated by forgery (115). Zaret’s discussion of literacy levels is brief and uncomplicated, but includes no reference to the source of the figures he

quotes (151), namely my own early work, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

It is curious that this study of communicative practices in the early modern public sphere contains no reference to the Protestation of 1641, a nationwide mobilization of support for the Protestant religion. Yet the circulation of the Protestation in manuscript and in print, with its parish by parish collection of signatures and endorsements, exemplifies the new politics of public opinion, or at least public involvement, that Zaret takes as his theme. Subsequent attempts to secure widespread subscription to the Vow and Covenant and Solemn League and Covenant are likewise ignored. More problematic is the very notion of public opinion. Although frequently invoked, this key concept is never adequately examined. Who is thought to constitute the public, and whose voice, whose voices, lie behind the myriad print productions of the 1640s? What combination of coercion and opportunism, wishful thinking and self-interest, thoughtfulness and fickleness, went into the writing and signing of petitions? What grounds are there for intimating that any opinions so expressed were rational? Questions of authorship and readership, production and reception, are notoriously difficult to pin down, but they deserve a more empirically grounded discussion. The material cited here can be used to argue for the variety and vitality of early modern culture, and its remarkable outpourings in the years of revolution. It can be used, as others have used it, to push back in time the onset of the public sphere. Whether it can also be used to identify the origins of democratic culture, and to find them in a revolution in communicative practices in revolutionary England, remains unproven. Each to his own, but historians would ask different questions.

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*Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* by Lynne Magnusson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pp. x + 221. \$59.95.

Lynne Magnusson's book, as the Introduction maintains, investigates "the richly complex rhetoric of social exchange in early modern England" (1), by way of discourse analysis and linguistic pragmatics, drawing various-

ly on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, M. M. Bakhtin, and the politeness theory of Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson. The book is closely argued and cogently written, “a practical analysis,” as Magnusson puts it, “of how social relationships are constructed both in dramatic dialogue and in epistolary exchanges” (7-8). However, because of this problematic division in the material it seeks to investigate (letters *and* dialogue), and because some of the book's basic assumptions are questionable, the exegesis is only a marginally successful examination of *both* Shakespeare's dramatic language and Elizabethan letters.

The book comprises, besides an Introduction, seven chapters divided into three parts. Part I, “The Rhetoric of Politeness,” deals with the language of positive and negative politeness—the rhetoric of social interaction—in *Henry VIII* (ch. 1); it also analyzes the negotiations of the language of service and power in six Sidney family letters and in Shakespeare's sonnets 57, 58, 88, 89, and 94 (ch. 2). Part II, “Eloquent Relations in Letters,” investigates how the letter-writing manuals of Erasmus and Angel Day map and disseminate social “interactional scripts” (ch. 3); examines how courtly and administrative letters mediate social and verbal relationships (ch. 4); and investigates the influence of merchant letter-writing manuals on socially stratified language and how they intersect with some of Shakespeare's dramas (ch. 5). Part III, “A Prosaics of Conversation,” concerns the maintenance of conversation, social interaction, and identity formation in *King Lear* and *Much Ado about Nothing* (ch. 6); and examines how rhetorical performance—discourse production and reception—acts as a manipulation of symbolic, linguistic capital in *Othello* (ch. 7). Magnusson's methods of analysis comprise “seeking common ground between cultural criticism and close reading” in order to “read the socially situated verbal interaction of [Shakespeare's] time” (10, 1).

The book falls into two distinct parts: those dispersed chapters which investigate social dialogue (primarily conversational, linguistic performance in the plays of Shakespeare), and those chapters which analyze letters (epistolary texts and letter-writing manuals). How comfortable one is with Magnusson's conflation of written and oral categories will define how convincing one finds the argument. This reviewer did not feel that the awkward and often troublesome conflation of the oral and the written (described in the title as dialogue and letters) was either necessary or decisively persuasive.

Magnusson's overall argument is based on three crucial assumptions: 1) that face-to-face interaction is the same as that mediated by letters (3, 63, 65, and *passim*); 2) that Shakespeare's dramatic dialogue represents actual, quotidian dialogue (18, 159); and 3) that his drama constitutes a conversational discourse (27, 29, 155). Such assumptions are questionable, however. Letters and theater are not the same media, despite the fact that they share several characteristics; care must be taken when examining them together. To

support the conflation of the oral and the written, Magnusson applies the trope which epistolary theorists and manual-writers employ—that letters are “mutual conversation[s] between absent friends” (3, 63). But it is just that: a trope of orality transferred to the often uncertain, untrustworthy, and unstable medium of epistolary communication, a remystification of categories which insists that letters “are closely related to speech act categories” (65). Walter Ong’s conception of degrees of “oral residue” informing written and printed texts is a similar mystification. Moreover, conversational discourse analysis, that of Brown and Levinson for instance, assumes face-to-face contact, and often does not apply to epistolary interaction, since the letter is a disembodied mode of communication assuming spatial and temporal distance between the communicators.

When dealing with epistolary, the book is not so much about Elizabethan letters as it is about Elizabethan letter-writing manuals. By my count, Magnusson puts forth 29 specimens of actual letters or excerpts from circulated missives, a very small sample which is neither sufficient for a study on Elizabethan letters, nor inclusive enough for the gestures toward a universal politeness theory of early modern epistolary. (The cultural anthropology model serving as the basis of the argument is that of Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*.) Magnusson’s assumption, of course, is that highly theorized letter-writing manuals generally represent early modern epistolary practice—indeed they do, but only to a limited extent. The logic of Magnusson’s assumption short-circuits discussion and examination of the mass of real early modern letters which might have been more persuasively employed. In Magnusson’s defense, however, the massive body of surviving letters from the period is a problem for any scholarly study of letters; it is difficult if not impossible to generalize about such an unwieldy genre. Previous studies of letters such as Claudio Guillén’s “Notes toward the Study of the Renaissance Letter,” Jonathan Goldberg’s *Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance*, and Frank Whigham’s “The Rhetoric of Elizabethan Suitors’ Letters” also tend to this focus on letter-writing manuals. Furthermore, the suggestion that Shakespeare used letter-writing manuals in composing his plays (3, 12, 118) is largely unsupported and speculative, and neglects what speech patterns and linguistic forms Shakespeare may have absorbed from an intensive grammar school education based on the study of rhetoric and on the epistles and epistolary fictions of classical writers such as Pliny the Younger, Ovid, Cicero, and Seneca.

I do not wish to suggest, however, that Magnusson does not make several astute observations in this book. Some chapters simply work better than others. The chapter on the Sidney letters and Shakespeare’s sonnets (ch. 2), for example, is convincing since its analysis adheres to the medium of the written text: the sonnets of Shakespeare can be usefully studied in the con-

text of epistolarity since the material media (the letter, the manuscript-circulated sonnet, as written texts) are exchangeable documents and material representations of duty, service, and clientage. Likewise, the discussion of merchant discourse (ch. 5) is persuasive since the letter-writing manuals Magnusson offers (such as John Browne's *The Marchants Aviso*) were meant especially to teach merchants how to compose business letters, but also because Magnusson recognizes that "the material condition of market exchange, with its deferral of face-to-face negotiation" relied almost entirely upon letters for such exchanges (124). The letter here is acknowledged as an alternative medium, ontologically distinct from face-to-face communication.

Since essentially half of this relatively brief book is on Shakespeare and half is on epistolary writing, the exposition feels rather sketchy and disjointed. For a book whose title suggests that it is primarily about Shakespeare, its middle chapters (3, 4, most of 5) deal only tangentially with the Bard, making some mandatory, but arbitrary, connections back to Shakespeare in their conclusions. Reorganization could have aided the movement of the exposition. Chapters 1 and 6, dealing as they do with dramatic dialogue, speech events, and discourse analysis, are distanced by the intervening chapters; in addition, the letter-writing manual material might have been more usefully placed first, as a basis on which analyses of relational and interactional scripts could have been built. On the whole, Magnusson would have done better to limit the argument to oral performance and politeness theory/discourse analysis, or stick to Elizabethan letters, for there is, indeed, a wealth of epistolary material to investigate, and Magnusson makes much investigative headway here. Chapter 4, for example, on business and administrative letters, intriguingly investigates how power is negotiated through expressions of affect and friendship, for these state letters frequently work in the context of the familiar letter; it is also the chapter in which Magnusson presents several genuine letters as evidence for the argument. Interestingly, considering the book's title, Shakespeare's dramatic letters, those contained in his plays and exchanged by their characters, are never considered—a bit puzzling perhaps since these exist *both* in the context of dramatic speech performance and employ the typical generic conventions of the epistle.

Finally, I am pleased to see Magnusson reach forward into an area of investigation too often ignored. Undeniably, early modern English letters are the last relatively unexplored literary form; Magnusson has begun to analyze these texts, as the author notes, "making a beginning at the serious rhetorical study of early modern administrative letters, treating them as texts in their own right, an agenda suggested by new historicist assertions about the rhetoricity of historical documents but generally left undeveloped" (4). Magnusson's foray into letters requires much supplementation; the vast archive of early modern epistolary texts awaits much further exploration.

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*The Gothic Family Romance: Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order* by Margot Gayle Backus. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999. Pp. xi + 291. \$49.95 cloth; \$17.95 paper.

Margot Gayle Backus's new book, *The Gothic Family Romance: Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order*, is a valuable, provocative interdisciplinary contribution to the fields of Gothic literature, Irish studies, and contemporary theory. Marshaling a diverse body of critical, historical, and supporting materials, Backus explores three centuries of writing and "map[s] out the formation of the nuclear family in relation to the emergence in British and Anglo-Irish literature of depictions of families and social orders that . . . covertly devour children" (4). Her focus on "the relationship of familial reproduction, children's experiences within families, and colonial politics" (4) emphasizes what she sees as the autophagous nature of British and Anglo-Irish social and governmental systems; that is, such systems secure their power by destroying, literally and figuratively, each generation of children. Backus briefly discusses the theoretical underpinnings of her book in the introduction. Carefully drawing together elements of post-colonial, sociological, psychoanalytic, Marxist, and Gothic scholarship, as well as queer theory, she points out that this body of work "call[s] our attention to the many guises in which dominant or authorized accounts are inevitably haunted by that which they exclude" (13). For Backus, "gothicism in Ireland clearly affords a privileged site for an investigation into marginal, suppressed experiences that continue to haunt the Irish symbolic order" (15). Of particular note is Backus's adaptation of Freud's concept of "the neurotic's family romance" (18). The psychological fantasy in which children simultaneously imagine that their "real" parents are aristocrats unknown to them, and conversely, in which they externalize their birth-parents' failings onto menacing strangers, takes on an explicitly Gothic shading through Backus's reading of Anglo-Irish Gothic literature as "British literary realism's 'return of the repressed'" (16). She argues that the political, social, and economic position of the Anglo-Irish in relation to Britain inscribes the psychoanalytic model of the family romance on a national scale. This combination of postcolonial, Marxist, and psychoanalytic theory serves as the primary lens through which Backus reads the texts in this far-reaching study.

The first two chapters of Backus's book lay the necessary groundwork for her later analysis of Anglo-Irish Gothic literature. Chapter 1 describes the dense interplay of forces that changed Ireland's political, social, and economic systems and which fostered the Anglo-Irish class. Backus weaves a complex network from many theoretical and historical threads, which I can

only sketch here: (1) the rise of a narrow Protestant English nationalism which subsequently cast the Catholic Irish as the denigrated, vilified Other against which the Anglo-Irish social order emerged; (2) a shift within Irish society away from matriarchal, communal social relationships toward patriarchal, restrictive, atomized structures; (3) the emergence of what Backus calls “the capitalist family cell” (36), based on Marx’s identification of the social contract inherent in capitalism and Foucault’s term for enclosed, nuclear families; and (4) the foregrounding of heterosexuality as the social norm, combined with a breakdown in extended kinship ties, which gave parents increased control over their children’s sexuality and led to the commodification of children in social relationships. The combination of these changes provides Backus with a methodological tool with which to read Gothic narratives allegorically.

In chapter 2 Backus applies her critical framework to Richardson’s *Clarissa*, showing how Gothic conventions throughout the novel encode the changes in familial and social structures taking place throughout the early eighteenth century. Backus analyzes Richardson’s novel, written contemporaneously with these changes, to establish the pattern she will examine in later Anglo-Irish Gothic narratives, which she claims parallel and intensify such an allegorical reading of *Clarissa*. Crucial to Backus’s thesis throughout the book is the attention she draws to “the increasing synchronization of private and public patriarchal values, as the middle-class family became emblematic of British national identity, values, and society” (69). This is perhaps Backus’s most successful chapter, focusing as it does on only one text, from multiple points of inquiry. Expanding on her use of Foucault, she argues that Clarissa’s constantly changing subject positions, descending from favored daughter to corpse, are the result of the Harlowes’ increasingly capitalist, sexually binarized, compulsorily heterosexual, silencing, and ultimately, self-consuming intrafamilial and social relationships.

Backus explores the core argument of *Gothic Family Romance* in chapters 3 through 7, demonstrating the various ways in which many Anglo-Irish narratives engage and magnify the triangular relationship between Gothic conventions, family dynamics, and sociopolitical changes found in *Clarissa*. In chapter 3, Backus focuses on works by Swift, Burke, and Edgeworth, three early Anglo-Irish writers who helped to consolidate their class’ cultural and social position during a time when that position was still somewhat fluid. By paying close attention to these writers’ use of irony, she locates Anglo-Irish anxiety, particularly Anglo-Irish children’s double bind of being neither “Irish” nor “English,” in the distance that an ironic stance seems to promise, yet cannot completely maintain. Backus’s model of the “gothic family romance” illustrates how families in texts such as “A Modest Proposal,” *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, and *Castle Rackrent* sacrifice their future growth as a means of shoring up their past histories and present conditions.

If the ironic stances of early Anglo-Irish writers attempt to disclaim, but ultimately acknowledge, their uncertain familial and social relationships, the “paranoid gothic” of nineteenth-century writers such as Maturin, Le Fanu, and Stoker is in full-fledged denial. Chapter 4 details the features which make *Melmoth the Wanderer*, “Carmilla,” and *Dracula* Backus’s “paradigmatic gothic family romance[s]” whose purpose is “to reincorporate denied feelings, perceptions, and experiences within a story that simultaneously rationalizes them and categorically denies their relationship to the family” (109). Specifically, Backus’s interest in these texts centers on the sexual subject formation of their young protagonists, and the efforts by competing institutions to co-opt those sexual identities for their own purposes. Continuing her allegorical reading of Gothic conventions in Anglo-Irish narratives, Backus asserts that Anglo-Irish paranoid Gothic serves its constituent class as a repository for the aspects of Anglo-Irish history and culture which the nineteenth-century British social order marginalized but could not completely silence.

In chapter 5, Backus takes an expansive view of the Gothic tropes of the devil’s bargain, the demon lover, and the living dead to mark a shift towards realism in the later Anglo-Irish Gothic narrative, Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Unlike the paranoid Gothic earlier in the century, which explicitly tried to project its fears onto demonized, usually foreign, Others, Wilde’s Gothic realism is deliberately recognizable as part of contemporary society, whose typically secret machinations are rendered explicit. Building on her analysis of Wilde, Backus then looks at the Gothic qualities of several Anglo-Irish narratives of World War I: Yeats’s “A Rose of Shadow,” Bowen’s “The Demon Lover,” McGuinness’s *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching toward the Somme*, and Johnston’s *How Many Miles to Babylon?* Throughout the texts in this chapter, Backus draws parallels between the contested social spaces of British male homosexual, and Anglo-Irish, identities.

Backus returns in chapter 6 to a topic she discussed briefly in connection with Edgeworth, the Anglo-Irish Big House narrative. After an initial reading of Yeats’s *Purgatory*, Backus traces the ambiguous, conflicted status of Anglo-Irish women in novels by Murdoch, Bowen, Keane, and Jacob, highlighting the differences in the Big House tradition that result from women’s disparate social position. According to Backus, these novels, which feature the burning of aristocratic, ancestral homes, record the destructive familial and social forces that Anglo-Irish Gothic realism can no longer contain. Burning the Big Houses, Backus argues, “represents the only possible end to intergenerational cycles of exploitation and abuse perpetuated by the intergenerational denial of colonial appropriation within the settler colonialist order” (213). Backus sees a kind of hope in these novels, especially Bowen’s and Murdoch’s, that destroying the entrenched Anglo-Irish domestic space might generate alternate, more liberating, possibilities for women.

McGuinness's *Baglady* and Johnston's *The Invisible Worm* are the basis for Backus's broadened examination in chapter 7 of Anglo-Irish Gothic realism, in which she uses the Gothic trope of the incest survivor to read the female characters in these two texts as allegorical representations of Ireland. Both as daughters of Anglo-Irish society and culture and as women capable of producing children to support the future of those systems, the Baglady and Laura are subjected to the greater desires of the familial and social relationships which define them, and which later reject them as tainted because of the incest they suffer. As Backus points out, McGuinness associates the Baglady with Mother Ireland through the particular image of the grieving Virgin Mary which was prevalent in Ireland after the Famine; Johnston uses imagery from Blake's "The Sick Rose" to equate Laura with Yeats's image of the rose of Ireland. Both the Baglady and Laura simultaneously embody and resist the meanings imposed on them by family, society, and history, and each takes a decisive action to break the cycle of self-consuming Gothic family romance. In Johnston's work in particular, Backus sees this cycle ending through Laura's refusal to repeat the sins of her parents, and in her breaking the silence about those sins perpetrated against her.

*The Gothic Family Romance: Heterosexuality, Child Sacrifice, and the Anglo-Irish Colonial Order* is generally successful in its ambition to canvass a heterogeneous group of British and Anglo-Irish texts through a multifaceted, nuanced critique. Backus skillfully weaves her theoretical models into a unified approach, avoiding the haphazard effect that might have resulted from combining several lines of criticism. A side effect of its ambition, however, is a sense that only *Clarissa* receives the full, detailed attention that Backus's sophisticated methodology requires. Every chapter has several subdivisions, and in each of two central chapters, Backus discusses five texts. These truncated sections, combined with Backus's frequently jargon-laden prose style, create a telescoped review in places where a more extended analysis might better serve Backus's overall study. By relegating to footnotes several statements about her use of the term "Anglo-Irish" instead of making them an explicit part of the contested territory she surveys, Backus risks conflating the shifting uses of this term over time, especially regarding contemporary writers such as McGuinness and Johnston. A noticeable omission in Backus's book is a specific discussion about what she sees as particularly "Gothic" about the tropes she selects, other than their frequent recurrence in the canon of Gothic literature. Such a discussion would add a helpful context to the divergent, and at first glance arbitrary, list of texts Backus covers. The strengths of Backus's study far outweigh these minor flaws, however. Setting a high standard for future interdisciplinary projects, *Gothic Family Romance* is a compelling study that will become an important book in Gothic criticism, Irish studies, and postcolonial studies.

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